

# FEAST

*The Guardian Guide to Bay Area Food and Drink Spring 2011*



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# Crisp 'n' crunchy

Wispy sprouts are thickening in the community garden plots, window boxes are beginning to heave with the sweet smell of thyme — let's go out to eat while we wait for our spring crops to hop-hop-hoppity in. This edition of our biannual Feast guide gives you suggestions from breakfast to dessert (as well as a guide to stocking your pantry creatively, for when it comes time to pick-your-own). Sharpen those incisors and dive in already.

Happy eats,  
Marke and Caitlin



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# Spring Feast 2011

## EDITORS

Marke Bieschke & Caitlin Donohue

## ART DIRECTORS

Mirissa Neff & Ben Hopfer

## PHOTOGRAPHERS

Ben Hopfer, Pat Mazzera, and Virginia Miller

## CONTRIBUTORS

Emily Appelbaum, Virginia Miller, Diane Sussman, Hannah Tepper, and the Guardian staff




## ON THE COVER:

George, Peter, and Tilly enjoy scoops courtesy of Bi-Rite Creamery ([www.biritecreamery.com](http://www.biritecreamery.com))  
PHOTOS BY PAT MAZZERA

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# 6 best breakfast bets

*Up before noon?*

*The Guardian counsels eating*

SF: a brunch town if ever there was one. The life of the alternative journalist is such that we're rarely awake at sunrise, wondering from where the hell our next hangtown fry will materialize. But there are times when it behooves one to dine at 8 a.m. on a weekday (occasions that usually correspond to the appearance of a mother or father). Set that alarm, sweetie: here's where you'll find Guardian staff dragging to before a big day.

## JUST FOR YOU

A menu peppered with delightful little zingers like "What's grits? It's that pasty white stuff ... like you had in prison," makes this my favorite sassy breakfast joint in Dogpatch. Just For You offers classic breakfast fare with a Southern twist — biscuits, cornbread, grilled catfish filets, or creole crab cakes to go along with your eggs and home fries. Breakfast is served all day, and if you're an early bird, you can even score a deal-worthy plate of two pancakes with coffee for just \$4.75 — but only if you get there between 7:30 and 8:30 a.m. weekdays. A strict schedule — just like you had in prison. **(Rebecca Bowe)**

732 22nd St., SF. (415) 647-3033, [www.justforyoucafe.com](http://www.justforyoucafe.com)

## JOANN'S CAFE

Two good reasons to get up early in the morning. One: you are going on an exciting air voyage. Two: a nice meal is waiting for you. Or both — that's generally the happy confluence that brings me to JoAnn's, a cheery diner-like entity en route to the airport, where a display case full of homemade muffins greets early risers and a menu full of American classics and salsa-tinged breakfast items await to congratulate the new dawn. The tiny joint opens at 7:30 a.m. every day, and even if you are flying solo (my favorite), JoAnn's counter seating provides the perfect perch to munch orange french toast and ponder whether you prefer the x-ray scan or the pat-down. **(Caitlin Donohue)**

1131 El Camino, South San Francisco. (650) 872-2810

## JIM'S RESTAURANT

Jim's is the ultimate greasy spoon, unpretentious, no-fuss diner food perfect for when you just want a simple breakfast and to avoid the scene. You won't find brioche french toast or bottomless sherbet-colored sparkling drinks on the menu; instead, you'll find classic breakfast options: eggs, pancakes, waffles — and beer, if that hangover's knocking. Five bucks gets you eggs, hash browns, bacon, fruit, and toast; for \$3 more, you can upgrade to hangtown fry. Speaking of relics, this joint is like the diner that time forgot. Wood-paneled walls and AM Gold on the stereo could keep you lingering till the afternoon. **(Jackie Andrews)**

2420 Mission, SF. (415) 285-6020

## NEW POTRERO MARKET

I like to live outside the laws — of good nutrition, that is — and skip breakfast. But on those days when I'm extra-hungry or extra-rich, I'll pick up a piece of fruit at New Potrero Market, right by the Guardian office. (Just go with whichever looks the most appealing — usually the bananas are pretty good, although they don't always have them



PHOTO BY BEN HOPFER

in stock. Apples are a good alternative. I don't like oranges. Too much work, especially in the morning.) I don't drink coffee, but I make up for it in Diet Cokes, which are also available at New Potrero Market. True convenience. **(Cheryl Eddy)**

301 18th St., SF. (415) 282-2225

## BREAKFAST AT TIFFANY'S

When I want sheer comfort with a side of 1970s and Audrey Hepburn, I head to Breakfast at Tiffany's. There, servers call you "hon" as the Beach Boys play on cassette tapes and you sip coffee, gazing at a faded *Breakfast at Tiffany's* poster. But this dive provides a lot more to sink one's teeth into than kitsch. I love Tiffany's pancakes loaded with fresh blueberries, and they taste even better as you sit at the counter, watching them transform from batter to fluffy cakes on the griddle. For savory contrast (and if you have room), order giant hash brown "sandwiches" stuffed with ham, cheese, onions, and all-around goodness. **(Virginia Miller)**

2499 San Bruno, SF (415) 468-0977

## CAFE LEILA

Don't be thrown off by Cafe Leila's flowery San Pablo facade or frilly name. Once you're inside, it's serious breakfast time whether you're a morning person or a hungover owl. With a big dining room and sunny, cute patio, you'll be sure to find a good amount of personal space to scarf down one of their many innovative breakfasts. Aside from a few everyday bagel options, Cafe Leila comes up with crazy omelet ideas that make me feel special, like the date omelet, a pile of farm eggs with dates and feta. And with three kinds of hot sauce, my condiment voice is always saying "Leilaaaaa." **(Hannah Tepper)**

1724 San Pablo, Berk. (510) 525.7544, [www.cafeleila.com](http://www.cafeleila.com)

## AXIS CAFÉ AND GALLERY



# 7 brunch cocktails

## *Why be sober when you can sparkle?*

It's noon on a Saturday — for you, we envision two possible scenarios. One: you're covered in glitter, you smell like a wet poodle, and you're on your way to brunch. Two: you're well-rested after last night's sobering yoga, feeling fly, and on your way to brunch. Hey booze breath, forget the three Advil, coffee, and a Xanax — you know there's no better way to kick a hangover (or forge the path toward one) than to cocktail your way through the early afternoon. And Miss Fresh-As-A-Daisy? Have a drink already. Always helpful, never hurtful, here is our list of the tastiest brunch libations of the moment. **(Hannah Tepper)**

### FOG CUTTER AT BAR AGRICOLE

This sleek SoMa restaurant is known in some circles as the Chez Panisse of cocktails, so it's no wonder that its brunch offerings include libations worth writing home about, once you've sobered up. One standout is the fog cutter, a complex citrus drink made with pisco, rum, gin, sherry, citrus juice, and orgeat (almond syrup) served on the rocks and with a taste that's similar to a mai tai. Planning on catching up with your correspondence later that day? We suggest you stick to one, for clarity's sake.

355 11th St., SF. (415) 355-9400, [www.baragricole.com](http://www.baragricole.com)

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## GINGER LEMON DROP AT CAFÉ FLORE

There is a stretch of Market Street that catches us unawares: one minute you're surrounded by city, the next you're in front of a magical garden filled with people downing bloody marys and eating eggs benedict. Ah, Café Flore, your lush patio makes us feel guilty for not drinking at breakfast. But we resolve not to live our life in shame. The ginger lemon drop, a Café Flore original, is the perfect way to kick off a day of leisure. Ginger liqueur and fresh lemon juice will have you feeling like you're drinking pure, unadulterated sunshine, while the Ketel One vodka buzz reminds you that you're actually just drunk.

2298 Market, SF. (415) 621-8579, [www.cafeflore.com](http://www.cafeflore.com)

## MOJITO AT THE RAMP

You're already on a mission to brunch, why not indulge in a meal amid the ocean breezes? Salty winds plus brunch treats and cocktails equals living large at The Ramp, which sits all the way at the end of Dogpatch's Mariposa Street, perched on the pier of a boatyard. Grab a table inside the funky dining room or outside on the water and make sure to order one of the fresh mint mojitos. Two sips in, and you'll be feeling like a brunch pirate. Day drunk ahoy!

855 Terry Francois, SF. (415) 621-2378, [www.ramprestaurant.com](http://www.ramprestaurant.com)

## SPICED ALEXANDER AT AXIS CAFÉ AND GALLERY

The standard Alexander cocktail is made with gin, chocolate liqueur, and cream, a mature take on chocolate milk. The spiced Alexander at Axis Café, a lowkey but upscale café and art gallery at the base of Potrero Hill, is served hot and spiked with soju — great by itself or with one of the café's whole wheat pancake and poached cranberry plates. A lesser-known brunch beverage, yes, but it pairs way better with waffles than a tequila shot. Like an old-fashioned hot cocoa, Axis' is sweet, creamy,

and warm — perfect for the seats by the joint's roaring fireplace.

1201 Eighth St., SF. (415) 437-2947, [www.axis-cafe.com](http://www.axis-cafe.com)

## BLOODY MARY AT HOME

While it's true that you can build your own bloody mary in the comfort of your home, doing it at Market and Church Street's comfiest brunch spot is much more exciting. Home puts the world at your fingertips: pickled veggies, olives, and over 15 kinds of hot sauce. This, friends, is the art of taking bloody mary by the horns.

2100 Market, SF. (415) 503-0333, [www.home-sf.com](http://www.home-sf.com)

## MICHELADA AT COCK-A-DOODLE CAFÉ

This downtown Oakland breakfast spot has the brunch drink for when you're looking to kick off your free day with some heat. As all those who have ventured south of the border will recall, the michelada is a bloody mary gone Mexican, the dreaded red beers (lager and tomato juice) of your college days gone festive. Crisp Corona, lime, and Cock-A-Doodle's house bloody mary mix await you, served in a huge salt-and-chile-rimmed glass that's ready to *baila contigo*.

719 Washington, Oakl. (510) 465-5400 [www.cockadoodlecafe.com](http://www.cockadoodlecafe.com)

## IRISH COFFEE AT THE BUENA VISTA

The Buena Vista's Irish coffee story is frequently repeated by a certain faction of Bay Area folks. It is said, usually after the storyteller has downed a few, that this Fisherman's Wharf bar was the first to perfect the drink on this side of the Atlantic. The Buena Vista's Irish coffee is a proprietary mix of Irish whiskey, hot joe, and frothy cream — and although a friend of ours once wisely told us never to mix our uppers with our downers, to her we say: welcome to brunch drinks.

2765 Hyde, SF. (415) 474-5044 [www.thebuenavista.com](http://www.thebuenavista.com)

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SF Examiner*

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## ESTELA'S SANDWICHES



PHOTO BY BEN HOPPER

## 9 meat-free marvels

### *Vegetarian sandwiches take over the world*

The sandwich, like the wheel, is an timeless invention that keeps us rolling. But if you be a vegetable lover, or just someone who fantasizes about two pieces of bread cradling things other than animal carcass, you must plan ahead — or risk finding yourself stuck with a woefully dull cheese and lettuce number. Lucky for us, here in the Bay we celebrate all sandwich orientations — some with brassy beets, others laced with sweet and spicy barbeque sauce, all ample reasons to raise our veggie flags high as we chow down. **(Hannah Tepper)**

#### VEGGIE BBQ SANDWICH AT RHEA'S DELI

Best. Sandwich. This Mission District locale constructs an incomparable veggie BBQ sandwich. Somewhere in this combination of spicy, moist, toasty tastes full of coleslaw and some mysterious sort of thrillingly breaded veggie “chicken” is an addictive chemical. I’m not willing to rule out crack. I love this sandwich. The end.

800 Valencia, SF (415) 282-5255

#### FALAFEL WRAP AT JB'S PLACE

This unassuming Potrero Hill joint makes its own amazing falafel — crunchy and crisp on the outside with a soft herbaceous center. Folded into JB’s warm pita wrap, the falafel balls are supported by the tang and crunch of tahini and lettuce. This Middle Eastern lunch is big enough to satisfy even the hungriest of veggie-sauri.

1435 17th St., SF. (415) 626-7973



### VEGGIE HOAGIE AT MISSOURI LOUNGE BAR

The veggie hoagie sandwich here is well worth the longish wait that can ensue after ordering at the tent-covered backyard grill. This monster mouth-filler is boldly served with multiple small Morningstar veggie patties. But fear not the brand-name base — the Lounge stakes a proprietary note on this sandwich with its own pesto mayo, sautéed mushrooms, and degree of toasted perfection. The two beers you'll drink while waiting will not make this hoagie any less delicious.

2600 San Pablo, Berkeley. (510) 548-2080 [www.missourilounge.com](http://www.missourilounge.com)

### TOFU CHAY BANH MI AT SAIGON SANDWICH

I challenge you to find someone in this city without a sworn affection for banh mi — with snazzy purveyors of the Vietnamese sandwich nuggets opening up on the swanky section of Fillmore Street, they're all the rage these days. But the Tenderloin's Saigon Sandwich makes a down-to-earth yet killer tofu chay banh mi. Crunchy, sweet, and spicy, it'll leave first-timers and experienced banh mi handlers sparkling — but the best thing reason to twinkle? The price — \$3.25!?!

560 Larkin, SF. (415) 474-5698

### SEITAN CHEESESTEAK AT JAY'S CHEESESTEAK

Don't be fooled by the name — Jay's is not your everyday cheesesteak dealer. The Mission and Western Addition locations carry a variety of seitan sandwiches that will dazzle your palate no matter how you (mis)pronounce the meat substitute therein. Those unfamiliar with seitan might be interested to note that this wheat gluten-based product has the meat-like qualities of chewiness and savoriness — all without the killing animal guilt. Jay's is saucy, so prepare with napkins along with your appetite.

3285 21st St., SF. (415) 285-5200; 553 Divisadero, SF. (415) 771-5104, [www.jayscheesesteak.com](http://www.jayscheesesteak.com)

### VEGGIE MUFFALETTA AT ESTELA'S SANDWICHES

Sun-dried tomato pesto, artichoke spread, fresh basil, lettuce, tomato, red onion, carrots, cucumber, and pea sprouts, all drizzled with lemon-oregano vinaigrette on telera bread. Estela, we thank you for your veggie muffaletta.

250 Fillmore, SF. (415) 864-1850

### VEGGIE SANDWICH AT BETTE'S DINER

You can find a lot of great food here. Eggs, hashes, and good old diner fare are among the specialties, but Bette's simple veggie sandwich hits the mark with its simplicity and freshness. With avocado, roasted red bell peppers, marinated cucumbers, baby greens, and vinaigrette on a baguette, you'll be enchanted by this no-frills knockout.

1807 Fourth St., Berk. (510) 644-3230

### VEGGIE RUEBEN AT THE PLANT CAFÉ

There are times when even I, an ardent vegetarian, mourn the loss of reubens. Chewy, hearty, a gut punch of protein and sauce — thank Gaia, then, for Plant Cafe's veggie reuben. Who cares what it's made of — the zinger is smothered in sauerkraut, Swiss cheese, and that creamy cure-all: thousand island dressing.

Various locations, SF. [www.theplantcafe.com](http://www.theplantcafe.com)

### BEET SANDWICH AT THE ATLAS CAFÉ

The super-healthy beet sandwich here will tolerate no beet phobia. Accented by kale and vinaigrette on chunky whole wheat bread, its heft and fuchsia weight promise health and happiness. But you have to go to great lengths to procure one: namely, braving the Atlas Cafe's roomful of smarmy hipster-people staring at laptops (maybe you — quit spilling beets on your shirt, dammit).

3049 20th St., SF. (415) 648-1047, [www.atlascafe.net](http://www.atlascafe.net)



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# 10 contemporary kitchen essentials

By now, you (hopefully) know the basic building blocks of good eating: fresh, in-season vegetables and fruits, whole grains, and — for the carnivorous set — lean, unprocessed meat and fish. Awesome. But unless you're an adherent of the new Paleo diet fad, which mimics the eating habits of our hunter-gatherer ancestors, it's going to take a bit more to transform this no-frills foundation into something you'd want to sit down to. Here are a few kitchen essentials that can quickly shift your cooking from serviceable to superb. **(Emily Appelbaum)**

## SESAME OIL

Ancient Assyrian legend holds that when the gods assembled to create the universe, their drink of choice was sesame seed wine. And when Ali Baba needed to unseal a magic cave stocked with treasure, it was *Sesamum indicum*, which bursts open at maturity, that he invoked with the famous phrase "Open, Sesame!" If you're looking to introduce some similar magic into your cooking, sesame oil is a good place to start. The cold-pressed oil has a light flavor and high smoke point, making it ideal for fast, high-temperature stir fries and wok cooking. When toasted, the oil becomes rich, smoky, and deep. A few drops make salads and noodle dishes sinfully savory and create the perfect base for dipping sauces. For a decadent indulgence, try the following: spread hot toast with miso (fermented soybean paste), top with a slice of avocado, and a drizzle of toasted sesame oil, then close your eyes and float a bit.

Available at Ming Lee Trading Inc. 759 Jackson, SF. (415) 217-0088

## TAHINI

Speaking of sesames, Bay Area veggies, vegans, and carnivores alike have been blending tahini, a paste made from hulled sesame seeds, into homemade hummus for years. When mixed with a little fresh garlic, lemon, and salt, tahini will make quick work of a can of garbanzos — but there are tons of other uses for this simple spread. Try branching out with bean dips. Include white cannellini beans, black beans, or even kidney beans, which are super-high in antioxidants. Ditch expensive bottled salad dressing in favor of tahini mixed with soy sauce, lemon juice, or cider vinegar, and any fresh herbs you like. Toss soba noodles with steamed veggies and tahini for a fast, healthy dish served hot or cold. Or, for a whole array of desserts, start by kneading tahini and honey into flour for a tender, pliable pastry.

Available at Semiramis Imports, 2990 Mission, SF. (415) 824-6555

## QUINOA

If you haven't tried this indigenous staple from the Andes, you're missing out. Stocked with the full set of essential amino acids, these unassuming seeds may be the most complete protein source the plant kingdom can provide. Quinoa even made NASA's short list for crops to be included in ecological life support systems for long-duration manned spaceflights. It cooks in minutes and — with its mild, nutty taste and light texture — it's an ideal base for curries, stews, and cold salads mixed tabouleh-style. Unfortunately, the quinoa craze in



wealthy countries has left the crop unaffordable in some traditional regions such as the Bolivian salt flats, where most cultivated quinoa is now grown for export. Be sure to look for quinoa from companies like La Yapa Organic that pay a fair price to farmers.

Available at Rainbow Grocery, 1745 Folsom, SF. (415) 863-0620,  
[www.rainbow.coop](http://www.rainbow.coop)

### COCONUT MILK

If you're the kind of good San Francisco citizen who duly visits the local farmers market every week, gets carried away by the textures and colors and aromas of nature's bounty, and then balks at everything you've brought home when it comes time to stuff it in the fridge — fear not. Coconut milk is the thing for you. Nothing else can so quickly transform a mountain of disparate vegetables into a rich, harmonious meal. Nearly any food in any season (potatoes regular and sweet, carrots, sweet and spicy peppers, pineapple, green beans, onions, garlic, eggplant, zucchini, tomatoes, pumpkin, spinach, kale) can feel at home in a coconut milk bath, spiced with a pinch of curry powder or garam masala and perfumed with handful of fresh herbs.

Available at Khanh Phong Supermarket, 429 Ninth St., Oakl.,  
(510) 839-9094

### FRESH-GROUND BLACK PEPPER

My list of Things for Which There Is No Excuse is short, and most of the items on it — like tube tops and being mean — are negotiable under certain circumstances. But one entry that cannot be compromised on is the use of pre-ground black pepper. It is simply never, ever OK. The difference between the freshly cracked pepper and the plebian, tasteless grey powder that sifts from a can is like the difference between a jam band CD and a live show. Invest in a good-quality peppermill and you'll end up putting pepper in all kinds of places you never imagined: after experiencing pepper's pungency in soups and bisques, on roasted root vegetables, and over tomatoes served sliced and sprinkled with kosher salt, you'll find yourself shaking it onto strawberries marinated in balsamic vinegar and pondering the possibilities of peppercorn ice-cream. A few turns of your grinder set to coarse can quite possibly make the world go 'round.

For more varieties visit San Francisco Herb Co.  
250 14th St., SF. (415) 861-3018, [www.sfherb.com](http://www.sfherb.com)

### FRESH-GROUND NUTMEG

Everything said on the subject of black pepper applies — with perhaps a smidge less fervor — to nutmeg. That sickly stuff stuck with humidity to the inside of a glass shaker at Starbucks does not even remotely resemble the delicately perfumed flakes that you scrape from a whole nutmeg seed, the hard, egg-shaped center of the nutmeg tree's fruit). Once you stop shaking the horrid pre-ground granules over your coffee, you're likely to realize the nutmeg is not just a sweet spice. It goes particularly well with cheese and cream sauces, enriches egg and pasta dishes, and enhances all types of savory cookery with that little something-something that makes diners go "hmmm." But if you want to relegate it to the dessert realm, no one's going to stop you from grating a little bit over your midnight dish of chocolate ice-cream.

Fremont-based organic spice company Spicely's products are available in bulk on its website. [www.spicely.com](http://www.spicely.com)

### FRESH GINGER

Like nutmeg, the edible rhizome of *Zingiber officinale* is often relegated to the subsidiary role of sweet spice — at least in American cooking. But travel nearly anywhere else in the world, from Morocco to Malaysia, Venezuela to Vietnam, and ginger plays the snappy star

in soups, roasts, stews, and salads. Grate fresh ginger and garlic into peanut oil as the base for a superlative stir-fry. Stir into soups for a revitalizing broth. For a crisp, peppery salad, shred cabbage, carrots, and green beans and toss with ginger, vinegar, or lime juice, and maybe a dollop of peanut butter (or use your newly purchased tahini). Pulse ginger, chiles, and garlic in your food processor for a quick crust to sear onto meats or tofu. Ginger is a versatile gal, so don't be afraid to experiment.

Available at New May Wah Market, 707-719 Clement, SF. (415) 668-2583

### FRESH LEMONS AND LIMES

Nothing wakes up heavy, sleepy flavors like a bright squeeze of acid, but don't even bother with the bottled stuff here. Before you juice, take a second to zest the thin colored rind — which contains tons of essential oils — from the outside of the fruit, being careful to stay away from the white pith. Then cut in half through the equator and squeeze. Older fruits can be coaxed to spill their juice by rolling back and forth between the palm and the cutting board. Or zap in the microwave for just a few seconds. Lemons add zip to Italian and French dishes, limes to Asian, Indian and Latin. The brave and adventurous might even try whole lemons or limes — rind, pith, pulp, and all — chopped very finely in salsas; crusts for veggies, fish or tofu; and marinades. An old-timey recipe for something called Funeral Pie uses whole lemons, thrown in a blender with some sugar, eggs, and a little flour. The result is poured in a pie crust and "Viola!" A super-quick desert ready in a flash, in case of Great Aunt Millie's untimely demise.

Bi-Rite Market stocks organic, biodynamic lemons and limes from Becks Grove whenever possible. 3639 18th St., SF. (415) 241-9760

### BLACK BEAN SAUCE

Hot Chinese sriracha sauce might be manufactured right here in Northern California, but that's no excuse for indiscriminately squirting that sticky red rooster bottle over everything — from eggs to escargot — that stands still long enough. If it's spice you're craving, aim for a subtler, deeper flavor. Chinese-style black bean sauces, garlic or chili, provide plenty of heat without the cloying, vinegary sweetness of sriracha. Instead, their fire is mellow and a bit smoky, and develops on the tongue. Try over steamed veggies such as asparagus, broccoli, or bok choy. Use to marinate tofu or chicken, and serve over everything from tempeh to tacos. If you like the taste, try going a step further and purchasing some fermented black beans — a salty, spicy condiment something like a cross between miso and Marmite.

Available at Pang Kee Bargain Market, 1308 Stockton, SF., (415) 982-1959

### REAL MUSTARD

All mustards are essentially a combination of whole or ground mustard seeds suspended in vinegar and spices. But subtle variations in the type of grind and proportions of ingredients can make all the difference. If you inhabit the realm of ballpark-yellow, your culinary development has been sorely stunted. All mustards work as emulsifiers, making them ideal mix-ins for dressings, marinades, and notoriously finicky Hollandaise sauces. Whole grain mustards combined with miso, maple syrup, horseradish, or Parmesan cheese (not all at once!) make a crunchy coating for salmon, chicken, pork chops, or baked squash. Finely-ground mustards like German Hangstenberg are superhot and go well with preserved meats and blander veggies like cabbage. Some mustards are made with imported vinegars or champagnes, and are best paired with simple breads and cheeses so their unique flavors come through. And for something a little closer to home, try Mendocino Mustards, made in Fort Bragg.

Available at Canyon Market, 2815 Diamond, SF. (415) 586-9999

## HIBISCUS



# 8 intriguing entrees

## *Breakfast and dinner are great times for a change*

Forget that gourmet mac 'n' cheese, leave behind another night of Neapolitan pizza — it's time to consider a meal that has yet to be repeated all over town. Here are a few that have really turned my head of late. (Virginia Miller)

### HIBISCUS

Hop a flight to the Caribbean via this downtown Oakland eatery, where chef Sarah Kirnon pulls together stimulating new interpretations of classic island flavors. A stand-out on this menu of tastes native to Barbados and Jamaica is Kinon's Dungeness crab cornmeal porridge, a comforting blue cornmeal mash laced with chunks of crab, butternut squash, carrots, leeks, and spiced up with bird's eye chili. It may be one of the best dishes she's served yet.

1745 San Pablo, Oakl. (510) 444-2626, [www.hibiscusoakland.com](http://www.hibiscusoakland.com)

### WISE SONS DELI

As long as it stays in its current form — a pop-up eatery that takes over Jackie's Vinoteca and Cafe on Saturdays — lines at Wise Sons are sure to stay painfully long. That's because nowhere else in the city can you get the authentic Jewish eats these young guys serve up. It's no surprise that after only a few weeks of operation, they're already in hot demand. Corned beef and pastrami are sliced before your eyes in all their meaty glory, excellent chocolate babka is earthy with dark chocolate or laced with Claressquares caramel in a sweeter incarnation. Don't miss house-smoked salmon with red onions and capers on a bialy, a traditional roll that's similar to a bagel but baked instead of boiled.

Saturdays 9 a.m. – 2 p.m. 105 Valencia, SF. (415) 787-DELI, [www.wisesonsdeli.com](http://www.wisesonsdeli.com)

### BAR BAMBINO

It was with delight I heard that one of the city's first Italian charcuteries was shifting to a Germanic-Italian cuisine that would focus on the Tyrol and Friuli regions. I've been craving Tyrolean food ever since I traveled the area in Italy — its melting pot of cultures equals pleasure on a plate. Bambino's executive chef Lizzie Binder plays with unique dishes like chewy, subtle pumpkin seed spaetzle, but my favorite is the Alpine bruschetta, simple hunks of rustic bread layered with Alpine ham, melted Montasio cheese, and horseradish kraut. It transported me straight back to dining on ham and cheese on sunny patios in the Alps.

2931 16th St., SF. (415) 701-VINO, [www.barbambino.com](http://www.barbambino.com)

### GITANE

Do not fear raw lamb. Do not expect gaminess. Order this dish — and prepare for fresh, succulent meat to rival the best beef tartares you've ever had. Chef Batson's lamb tartare is unexpectedly silky meat, loaded with flavor. The added bonus is three dollops of worthy spreads, from an eggplant compote to a mix of pomegranate, walnut, and red pepper. There's just no dish like it in town.

6 Claude, SF. (415) 788-6686, [www.gitanerestaurant.com](http://www.gitanerestaurant.com)

### FIFTH FLOOR

Since executive chef David Bazirgan recently climbed aboard, there are a number of noteworthy dishes here — particularly the Mendocino uni flan. It arrives unceremoniously, resembling a little bowl of foam. Dig into this "saffron air" and underneath you'll find Dungeness crab fondue and a silky uni flan. Heightened by aged kaffir lime and Sichuan pepper, you'll be dreaming about it all week.

12 Fourth St., SF. (415) 348-1555, [www.fifthfloorrestaurant.com](http://www.fifthfloorrestaurant.com)

### HELMAND PALACE

A highly underrated SF gem. Decor is not the latest or hippest — but even better, it's mellow and unassuming. It's easy to get a reservation, you can fill up for \$15, and even after 20 years, Helmand Palace remains our city's best Afghan restaurant. Although kaddo (pumpkin that is pan-fried, then baked) in yogurt-garlic sauce remains a favorite dish of mine, I'm just as crazy about aushak, Afghan raviolis filled with leeks and scallions and served in a sauce of yogurt, mint, garlic, tomato, and ground beef: Middle Eastern cuisine meets red sauce Italian.

2424 Van Ness, SF. (415) 345-0072, [www.helmandpalace.com](http://www.helmandpalace.com)

### ICHI SUSHI

Industry insiders sidle up to Ichi's sushi bar for impeccable fish from chef Tim Archuleta and crew. Archuleta keeps it seasonal and affordable — you'll find far less interesting slices of fish elsewhere at higher prices. There are also high quality hot plates, and a particular stand-out is the artistic beef tataki. All-natural beef is seared sous vide, then accented with radish, kimchee, white ponzu, and crispy burdock root. The meat oozes tenderness while the accompanying ingredients add dimension to the dish.

3369 Mission, SF. (415) 525-4750, [www.ichisushi.com](http://www.ichisushi.com)

### SPQR

Though everyone loves SPQR's rustic pastas and exquisite antipasti, you'll be equally satisfied at its bar with spuntini small bites and a glass of Italian wine from Shelley Lindgren's impeccable list. Executive chef Matthew Accarrino infuses Roman sensibilities throughout the menu, achieving near-perfection in snacks like milky burrata cheese, which runs over accompanying toast and is sweetened with honey, hazelnuts, and a hint of chili — savory, sweet, silky. Spiced ricotta fritters are equally unforgettable: warm, with a whisper of smoked maple syrup.

1911 Fillmore, SF. (415) 771-7779, [www.spqrsf.com](http://www.spqrsf.com)



# 5 gourmet gross-outs

From the design world to the fashion world, there are things that *go* and things that *don't go* (yes, you — guy in the striped shirt and madras Bermuda shorts ensemble; and you too, street scrounger hauling off that hideous oversized floral-pattern couch). But the truth is, these principles remain fixed only until some genius comes along and voila! isn't everyone on the runway looking sharp in stripes and madras? And doesn't that flower-power couch look great with that Marimekko wallpaper?

This is precisely the case with some of the weirdest — and tastiest — food pairings in town, dishes in which two icky foods combine to make a better one, or one perfectly good food, paired with a “say what?” one, becomes the way you want it from that point on. As these dishes show, the difference between *yuck* and *yum* is a mere two letters. **(Diane Sussman)**

## FRITO PIE AT GREEN CHILE PIES AND ICE CREAM

Consider the Frito pie (or depending on where you're from, the Frito boat or walking taco), a concoction of disputed and dubious origins. Was it Frito-Lay queen mum Daisy Dean Doolin, or Woolworth lunch counter waitress Teresa Hernandez who invented it? Then again, who really cares who first took a bag of Frito corn chips, smothered them with chili or taco meat, and topped the whole mess with cheese, onions, and jalapenos? Green Chile Pies — SF's standard-bearers of New Mexican cuisine — may be the only place in town to score this Southwestern carnival midway classic. GCP also takes the pie to daredevilish new heights, serving its version right out of the bag. And nothing says fresh like the sound and feel of your own crinkly bag.

601 Baker, SF. (415) 614-9411, [www.greenchilekitchen.com/pies](http://www.greenchilekitchen.com/pies)

## FRENCH FRY SANDWICH AT GIORDANO BROS

To most right-thinking Californians, what people in Pittsburgh eat is a mystery, if not an opportunity to ponder the eternal question: WTF? Noodle and cabbage halusky. Frizzle fry chipped ham sandwiches. Eat 'n Park smiley cookies. Or how about letting people have their french fries on their sandwich? Actually, on this one, we have back off. As served on one of the superlative and meaty sandwiches at Giordano Bros., this carb-on-carb combo means never having to pay extra for fries, or having to pause from your sandwich to grab some fries, or wondering if your last bite should be fries or sandwich. You can love the sandwich and save your Pittsburgh-hating for when the Pirates dare try to beat the Giants.

303 Columbus, SF. (415) 397-2767, [www.giordanobros.com](http://www.giordanobros.com)

## COTTAGE CHEESE SOUP AT COWGIRL CREAMERY SIDEKICK

Mmmm, beer. But mmmm, cottage cheese? And mmmm, brussels sprouts? And mmmm cottage cheese and brussels sprouts in soup? Before you dub such a commingling “best gag me a spoon” contender, consider Cowgirl Creamery Sidekick's cheese soup with cottage cheese dumplings. Yes, the staff has to allay the fears of bug-eyed browsers with a taste. But once tasted, many times eaten. Despite its unappetizing name, the hearty, earthy soup starts with shitake and vegetable-based broth infused with cheese and finished with hand-made cottage cheese dumplings and shavings of brussels sprouts. The cottage cheese, of course, is Cowgirl Creamery's hand-clabbered cottage cheese, which has prompted many a trek to the Ferry Building

## GREEN CHILE PIES



PHOTO BY BEN HOPFER

among people who care deeply about curds and whey.

One Ferry Building, SF. (415) 362-9354, [www.cowgirlcreamery.com](http://www.cowgirlcreamery.com)

## SARDINE SANDWICH AT BARBACCO ENO TRATTORIA

What focus group signed off on this one? What Italian fisherman stranded at sea with a puny catch told Barbacco Eno Trattoria that combining sardines and calamari was a good idea? After all, if there's one thing Americans abhor, it's sardines. And if there's one thing Americans adore even more than sardines, it's squid. But when all is said and cooked, Barbacco was wise to listen to the fisherman, and to unite fish and mollusk in one tasty sandwich. Maybe it's the Acme torpedo roll, or the spicy arugula, or Barbacco's housemade “roasted tomatoe condimento.” Whatever it is, two tentacles up. (Note: it's only available when sardines are swimming.)

220 California, SF. (415) 955-1919, [www.barbaccosf.com](http://www.barbaccosf.com)

## TUNA AND EGG SALAD SANDWICH AT M&L MARKET

Maybe you know some routinized drone who alternates every day between egg salad sandwiches and tuna salad sandwiches. Maybe you are that routinized drone. Maybe on the seventh day, you need to rest. But maybe you're afraid to rest, and the fear of the unfamiliar prevents you from publicly uttering the words “grilled cheese” or “hot dog today.” Those are the days to head to M&L Market, where they will make you a tuna-and-egg salad sandwich (together). But — beware the ordering protocol. Select your bread first or suffer the wrath of the woman known to regulars as “the sandwich Nazi.” Remember, this is everything you know and love in one sandwich: tradition, paired with tradition, in an entirely new context.

691 14th St., SF. (415) 431-7044

# 5 tapioca delights

When it comes to tapioca pudding, levels of neurosis tend to equal levels of nostalgia, with the haters depicting the starchy little pearls as “gummy, scary fish eyes” and the aficionados invoking Mom patiently stirring vanilla extract into the sweet milky mixture over a prairie Wedgewood.

Pearl drinks notwithstanding — and haven’t all those bubble tea places peaked yet? — tapioca pudding remains a rarity outside of a few Jewish delis and Southeast Asian restaurants. But when you do see it, the all-white comfort food has been getting a foodie and fusion makeover, with infusions of lime, maple syrup, and Grand Marnier; bases of cream, orange juice, or coconut milk (join us, lactose intolerant ones!); real vanilla beans instead of extract (sorry, moms), and purees of passionfruit, banana, and mango. Here are five places that serve their tapioca pudding proudly. Indeed, at a few of them, you either eat your tapioca (or sticky rice) or end your meal on a sour note. You choose. **(Diane Sussman)**

## OUT THE DOOR

Oh, Charles Phan — is there no humble Vietnamese street food you can’t turn into a sought-after gourmet delicacy? Not even tapioca pudding — to which you added a dollop of mango mousse for extra sweetness, a splash of lemon juice for refreshing tartness, a bit of cream for extra richness, all in a smooth coconut milk base? If there’s any criticism to be had, it’s that OTD’s tapioca pudding is only offered every day at the Westfield Centre outpost (sorry, Ferry Buildingers, you have to wait until summer to get yours). Not nice, Charles Phan, making us traverse the carny ride of an escalator for a bit of tapioca. And while we’re at it, here’s another criticism: OTD’s Ferry Building tapioca comes prepackaged in plastic containers — or is it a compostable composite? — so BYOB (bowl).

845 Market, SF. (415) 541-9913, [www.outthedoors.com](http://www.outthedoors.com)

## LE COLONIAL

Who says a night on the town can’t end in tapioca pudding? At the classic and classy Le Colonial, the French-Vietnamese restaurant in the Financial District, you can have it all. Le Colonial may also be the only restaurant in town that suggests a wine pairing for your tapioca pudding (a 2003 Royal Tokaji Aszu 5 Puttonyos). And, Le Colonial serves its tapioca, infused with coconut, over banana custard. That’s right, puddin’ heads, you don’t have to choose! Sop up the two-fer with Le Col’s wonton crisps, and get your textural, salty contrast. Granted, this tapioca isn’t cheap (\$9). But this is your big night out — go ahead and splurge in your own homey, comfy way.

20 Cosmo Place, SF. (415) 931-3600, [www.lecolonialsf.com](http://www.lecolonialsf.com)

## THE HOUSE

The House, along with lingering traces of the Beats, are two small respites from North Beach’s Italian theme-park vibe. Situated in an off-kilter, oddly-painted building on a triangulated corner at Grant and Fresno, the House serves Asian fusion fare like Maine crab cake with pickled ginger remoulade and wasabi noodles with Angus steak. Fusions aside, the House’s tapioca pudding may well be prettiest in all the land (take that, shellacked and air-brushed Martha Stewart Living centerfolds). For starters, House decorates its tapioca with a flowery swirl of mango puree that melds into the pudding for a jolt of extra sweetness. But it’s not just the artistry that makes it worth the \$4

## OUT THE DOOR



PHOTO BY BEN HOPFER

price tag: the pudding is smooth and creamy, with large pearls that have had all traces of gumminess warmed out of them.

1230 Grant, SF. (415) 986-8612, [www.thehse.com](http://www.thehse.com)

## PHUKET THAI

If there’s a tapioca pudding that has remained faithful to its pedestrian roots, this is it. No cream, no liqueur, no mousse. Indeed, compared to other places, Phuket’s tapioca can seem on the thin side, and the corn kernels for added sweetness and texture are decidedly off-trend. But Phuket has one thing going for it that no other local tapioca purveyor has: it serves its tapioca warm. That’s right, the cooks make it just for you. And nothing says “ma-ma” like tapioca right off the stove.

248 Divisadero, SF. (415) 864-8584, [www.phuketthaisf.com](http://www.phuketthaisf.com)

## WHOLE FOODS

Some days you need tapioca. You need it bad. You need it bad and you sure as hell aren’t going to make it yourself. And you’re certainly not going to eat another satay dish just to get to the tapioca, or resort to Kozy Shack (not because it’s bad — it’s good — but because the four-ounce containers are just too damn small and you’d have to eat the whole pack). Those are the days to head to Whole Foods’ prepared foods section, where eight-ounce containers of tapioca await. Although Whole Foods takes a classic approach to tapioca, it does up the gourmet ante by using cream (and milk) and a generous helping of vanilla. The result, of course, is smooth, creamy, and sweet — the way you wish your Mom had made it, if she hadn’t been saving the cream for something “special.”

Various locations, [www.wholefoodsmarkets.com](http://www.wholefoodsmarkets.com)



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